Thesis Report
on
Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies to Increase Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh

Submitted by

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Letter of Transmittal

April 25, 2025

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Subject: Submission of Thesis Report Titled "Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies in Increasing Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh"

Dear Madam,

With utmost respect, I am pleased to submit my thesis report titled **"Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies in Increasing Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh"**. This report is an integral part of the requirements for my MBA degree, and I have had the honor of completing my thesis under your valuable guidance.

The research explores how RTI policies impact the transparency and accountability of the power sector in Bangladesh. It incorporates insights from relevant literature, data collected from public records, and an analysis of the challenges and opportunities posed by RTI policies within the sector. I believe this report contributes significantly to understanding the role of transparency in managing public resources, particularly in the context of Bangladesh's power sector.

I would be grateful if you could share your feedback and thoughts regarding the report. Should you require any further clarification on any aspect of the thesis, I would be more than happy to provide additional explanations.

Thank you once again for your continued support and guidance throughout this process.

Yours Sincerely,

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Declaration of Student

I, Istiak Ahmmed, a student enrolled in the Master of Business Administration program at Sonargaon University, bearing the student ID: EMBA2401031020, hereby solemnly declare that the report titled **"Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies to Increase Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh"** has been solely and entirely authored by me.

Throughout the process of preparing this report, I have made diligent efforts to ensure that I comply fully with international copyright laws, academic integrity standards, and ethical guidelines related to research and reporting. I have taken the necessary precautions to ensure that all sources of information have been appropriately acknowledged and cited, and I have not plagiarized any material used within the report.

I further wish to clarify that this report has not been submitted for evaluation or used to fulfill the requirements of any other academic program or degree. This document is original and has been produced specifically for the completion of my MBA program at Sonargaon University.

Yours Sincerely,

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Letter of Authorization

I, Ummah Tafsirun, hereby formally confirm that the project report titled **"Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies to Increase Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh"** is the authentic and original work of Istiak Ahmmed. The research for this report has been conducted under my direct supervision and guidance.

I also affirm, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that the content and findings presented in this report have not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, in any other project report, dissertation, or thesis leading to the award of a degree to any candidate, either in the same context or a different one. This report is an independent contribution by the student, and all sources of information used have been properly acknowledged and cited.

This confirmation is given in good faith, based on the research and documentation provided by the student during the course of this project.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported and guided me throughout the journey of this thesis on "**Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies to Increase Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh".**

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Executive Summery

This study explores the implementation of Right to Information (RTI) policies in the power sector of Bangladesh, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research primarily focuses on the perspectives of designated Information Officers from 19 agencies under the power division responsible for the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity. Interviews were conducted with these officials, who are responsible for the practical implementation of RTI laws, to understand the challenges and barriers faced in ensuring transparency.

The study is framed using the theoretical framework developed by Newman and Calland (2007), which focuses on the drafting of RTI laws, the politics of implementation, government system building, and the demand for information. It explores factors such as the adequacy of record management, the political will for RTI, the attitude of officials, and the level of public awareness about RTI.

The findings suggest that RTI implementation has resulted in increased transparency and enhanced client satisfaction within the power sector. However, the attitude of officials toward RTI implementation was found to be largely positive, despite a prevalent culture of secrecy. Many officials expressed frustration over the volume of applications and the bureaucratic hurdles involved. Additionally, challenges like outdated record management systems, lack of resources, and insufficient public awareness of RTI laws were identified as significant barriers to effective RTI implementation.

The study also emphasizes the importance of training for civil servants and suggests the establishment of independent units dedicated to RTI implementation. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity of financial incentives and resource allocation for officials tasked with managing RTI requests.

Through a survey with 19 respondents, the study also identifies key challenges such as financial constraints, limited manpower, and the inaccessibility of government ministries. It suggests that proactive public awareness campaigns and the creation of specialized units for RTI management could significantly improve implementation.

In conclusion, the study concludes that while the RTI Act, 2009 has led to some improvements in transparency in the power sector, more efforts are needed to address the challenges identified. Recommendations for future improvements include enhancing record management systems, offering better training, and establishing independent RTI units in each ministry. Further research at the district level could provide a more comprehensive understanding of RTI implementation across Bangladesh.

This research contributes valuable insights into the implementation of RTI policies, especially from the perspective of those directly involved in its enforcement, which has been an underexplored area in existing literature on RTI in Bangladesh.

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Role of Right to Information (RTI) Policies to Increase Transparency in the Management of the Power Sector: A Case Study on Bangladesh

Chapter 01
Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) is a crucial tool that empowers citizens and fosters good governance. Recognized as a fundamental human right by the United Nations, RTI is also considered an essential human right in Bangladesh. Sweden became the first country in the world to implement the 'Freedom of the Press Act' in 1776.

The term "Right to Information" (RTI) used in different countries might vary from "Freedom of Information" (FOI) to "Access to Information" (ATI) or even the "Right to Know" (RTK) or "Open Government Information" (OGI). However, all these terms have similar interpretations as they stand for the people's right to access various kinds of information held by the government.

The real advancement of the Right to Information (RTI) took place in the second half of the 19th century when developed nations such as the USA, Norway, Denmark, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand passed Freedom of Information laws. Following their lead, many countries introduced their own Right to Information Acts in the 1980s. During this time, international organizations like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Council, and Commonwealth began advocating for laws on Freedom of Information to promote accountability and transparency in the public sector.

The UN Convention against Corruption (2003) acknowledged the vital role of information in encouraging public participation and combating corruption. Today, over 100 countries have implemented RTI laws, and many others are in the process of establishing similar legislation to ensure the free flow of information.

The Right to Information (RTI) Act was passed in Bangladesh in 2009 to ensure citizens' right to access information and promote the free flow of information. The primary goal of RTI is to enhance transparency, which can create a positive cycle of democratic participation and lead to significant changes in the nation's overall development (Worthy, 2010).

RTI also enables citizens to access other fundamental rights, such as education and employment, and is regarded as a basic human right (Darch and Underwood 2010). Transparency allows citizens to observe government activities; however, there remains

ongoing debate about its precise definition (Piotrowski, 2007). Considering the large number of countries currently implementing these types of laws and policies, very few studies are found. Implementation of right to information laws in many cases and areas are still largely unattended by scholars.

This paper aims to address the challenges and opportunities in implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009, in Bangladesh. Designated information officers from different agencies of power divisions have been interviewed and surveyed to better understand RTI implementation in practice.

In this paper, I explain the background of Right to Information in Bangladesh, discuss the current contexts within which the RTI acts as well as the laws are being implemented, and analyze my findings from the survey based on an accepted framework of Right to Information implementation.

The right to information in Bangladesh is different from other countries. First, the 2009 Right to Information Act was promulgated in Bangladesh by a non-party unelected Government though finally it was passed in Parliament by the democratic government. Since the RTI Act in Bangladesh was enacted in a non-democratic environment, through pressure, triggered by mainly a few non-government organizations, it is interesting to study how effectively it is being implemented. Bangladesh inherited its public management system from Pakistan which was also a legacy of the British colonial period. Due to the colonial mindset, the Civil Service could not fulfill citizens' expectations.

1.1 Research Rationale

The power sector is one of the critical components of a nation's infrastructure, serving as the backbone for economic development. In countries like Bangladesh, where energy demands are rapidly growing, efficient management of the power sector is crucial for sustainable development. However, the sector often faces challenges such as inefficiencies, corruption, mismanagement; which hinder optimal functioning. Consequently, ensuring transparency is vital for improving governance, ensuring access, and fostering public trust.

The Right to Information (RTI) Act has emerged as an essential tool for promoting transparency and reducing corruption in governance. By granting citizens the right to access governmental information, RTI policies empower the public to hold authorities accountable, thereby creating a more transparent decision-making process. However, despite its potential, there is limited empirical research on how effectively the RTI policy has been applied within the power sector and its impact on improving transparency.

This research will explore the role of RTI policies in promoting transparency in the management of the power sector in Bangladesh. Specifically, the study will examine the extent to which the RTI Act has been used by citizens, civil society organizations, and journalists to access information from key power sector institutions, such as state-owned electricity companies and regulatory bodies. This research will assess the ways in which RTI mechanisms influence the efficiency and accountability of power sector management, and whether access to information has led to tangible improvements in sector governance.

Despite the recognition of RTI as a mechanism to foster transparency, various challenges persist in its implementation. Limited awareness, bureaucratic resistance, and lack of effective enforcement of RTI laws may undermine the policy's impact. Therefore, it is essential to critically analyze both the successes and barriers to RTI implementation within the power sector in Bangladesh.

This research is timely and critical, as Bangladesh is undergoing significant energy reforms and facing growing demands for power. The outcome of this study will provide insights into the effectiveness of RTI as tools for improving governance in the power sector. Furthermore, it will contribute to the broader discourse on the role of transparency in enhancing the overall performance of critical sectors in developing countries, offering practical recommendations for policy improvements in Bangladesh and other similar contexts.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on available research on the implementation of the right to information in general as well as in the Bangladesh context, this study tries to explore the following questions:

1. What are the challenges to RTI implementation faced by the designated information officials in power sector in Bangladesh?

2. How can those challenges be overcome?

3. Does the implementation of RTI in Bangladesh increase transparency in the Government?

1.3 Research Terms and Definitions

Right to Information (RTI) policies: This includes all laws and regulations established in Bangladesh to ensure the fundamental legal rights granted to citizens under the article 39 (Freedom of thought and conscience, and of speech) of the Bangladesh constitution such as the Right to Information Act of 2009, Right to Information (Access to Information) Rules 2009, Right to Information (Disclosure and Dissemination of Information) Regulations 2010, Right to Information (Information Preservation and Management) Regulations 2010, Right to Information (Complaints Filing and Redress) Regulations 2011.

Transparency: It refers to the openness and accessibility of information, processes, and decisions made by public institutions and government bodies for public scrutiny. Transparency ensures that citizens have access to the information they need to hold government officials and institutions accountable.

Power sector: Power division of the Ministry of power energy and mineral resources of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and its subordinate agencies involved in the generation, transmission, distribution, and regulation of electricity.

1.4 Objective of the Research

The objective of this research is to examine the role of Right to Information (RTI) policies in enhancing transparency within the management of the power sector in Bangladesh. The study aims to analyze the role of Right to Information (RTI) policies in enhancing transparency and accountability in the management of the power sector in Bangladesh. Specifically, the study aims to:

i. To evaluate the effectiveness of RTI policies in providing access to information related to decision-making processes, financial management, and operational activities within the power sector.
ii. To examine the extent to which RTI contributes to reducing corruption, improving public trust, and fostering better governance in the power sector.
iii. To identify the challenges and limitations faced in implementing RTI policies within the power sector of Bangladesh, including institutional, legal, and cultural barriers.
iv. To assess the impact of RTI policies on stakeholders such as government agencies, private sector companies, and citizens, particularly in terms of their role in promoting sustainable energy management practices and policy reforms.
v. To provide policy recommendations for improving the integration of RTI mechanisms to further promote transparency and accountability in Bangladesh's power sector.

Chapter 02
Literature Review

Of the countries that are currently implementing RTI policies, more than half were established during the last decade (Vleugels, 2008). By 1989, only 13 countries had right to information laws in place, by 2014, 99 countries had adopted RTI legislations (Fattah, 2015). These laws, though initially established in western countries, are now expanding across the world (Roberts, 2006). Some countries, such as South Africa, Mexico and India, have shown remarkable performances in adopting progressive laws (Piotrowski, 2009).

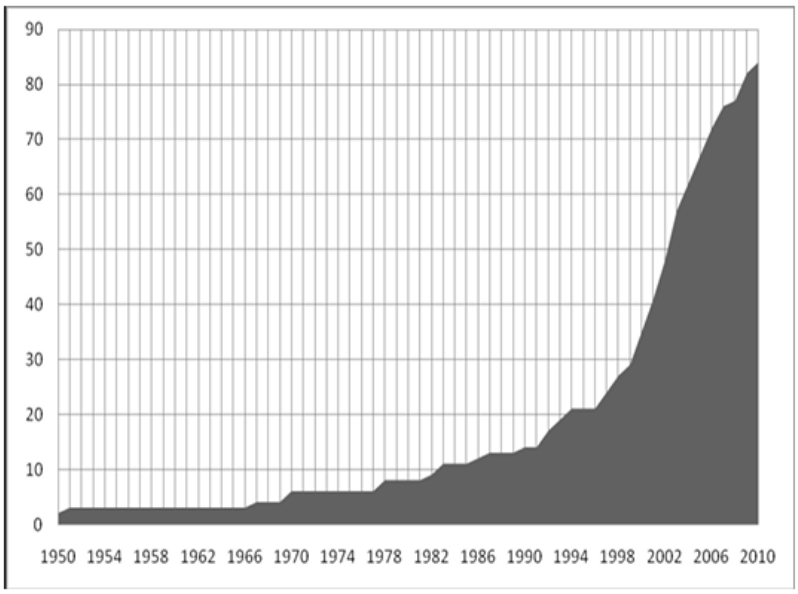


Figure-1: Growth of the number of countries with Right to Information laws

Successful implementation of any policy depends on many factors and actors. However, government officers mandated with processing right to information requests are the keystone of successful implementation. While many works have been conducted on right to information policies, implementation of RTI laws, to a great extent, has been given little attention. This is due to the restrictive accessibility of data in government offices in many countries. In the case of the USA, studies are found on the impact of management reform and use of contractors, in the implementation of right to information laws (Roberts 2010). In the case of Bangladesh, Ahmed (2012) says media in Bangladesh is practicing one kind of self-censorship. Hoq (2012) opines that there is a huge information focused activities in the rural and remote areas in Bangladesh. Baroi and Panday (2015) argue that access to information increases people's

ability to make choices. In India, Khan and Akhter (2015) found that RTI has close nexus with good governance and it minimizes nepotism and corruption. Agrawal (2012) shows RTI succeeded in reducing information asymmetry and exposing corruption. Liu (2016) argues that though OGR in China shows external value of transparency, Chinese government tailors information disclosure. Shepherd (2015) and Worthy, (2010) argue that FOI has increased transparency in national government with a greater open ness of culture and decision-making taken in public offices in UK.

In Bangladesh, so far, very few studies have been conducted on the implementation of RTI policies in the agencies of Power Sector, which are the key organizations of government of Bangladesh. The journey of RTI in Bangladesh started in 1983, when the Bangladesh Press Council first placed the demand for freedom to publish government information. There may be varying factors for providing right to information to citizens by the governments in different countries. However, when civil society plays a significant role in framing key provisions in the policy, it is likely to flourish, as evidenced in some countries such as South Africa, India, Bulgaria, Mexico, Peru, and Jamaica.

If there is a strong civil society, government's weakness is noticed and challenged as "... Committed civil society organizations serve as counterbalance to faltering implementation effort" (Neuman, 2007). In Bangladesh, neither the masses demanded, nor the government itself felt it necessity to implement right to information laws.

The Right to Information Ordinance was enacted in 2008 by the Caretaker Government[1] (CTG) as an outcome of concerted efforts by some NGOs, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The demand was made on the basis of the constitution of Bangladesh and related international laws.

The RTI Act in neighboring countries such as India and Nepal also had some positive influence. It can be termed as supply-driven since international contexts and Bangladesh's obligation as a signatory country in many international laws and conventions were capitalized upon and triggered by the local NGOs, which were also funded by international donors. After the ordinance was passed by the CTG, it became an obligation to all major political parties to commit to it. The two major political parties committed to implement RTI in the election

[1] Caretaker Government: This is a non-party Government which is supposed to conduct a free fair Election for political parties; they cannot take any major policy decision. Bangladesh had four elections conducted by Caretaker Government.

manifesto. The winning party kept its promise and remained faithful to the commitment. The Parliament finally passed “The Right to Information Act” in 2009.

Prior to the enactment of the 2009 Right to Information Act, the government of Bangladesh introduced the Citizen’s Charter in 2007, primarily in those public organizations which provided basic public services; and power sector is one of them. This was the first step to making citizens aware their right to know what types of services they were entitled to receive from which type of organizations. It also included the modality and timeframe of the services, as well as remedial steps for citizens if they did not get the proper services. The introduction of the Citizen’s Charter actually paved the foundational way for the right to information in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, both domestic and international laws have created an obligation towards making RTI policies.

The Preamble of the Bangladesh Constitution pledges many rights to citizens. The rule of law and fundamental human rights and freedom conform to Article 39 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and speech to every citizen. However, these are subject to reasonable restrictions as set by law. This article also recognizes freedom of the press. The notion of freedom of expression, implicitly, recognizes the freedom of the right to information.

However, there was no legal provision in Bangladesh regarding that right to Information. Moreover, there was no scope of using this provision as a fundamental human right as it did not directly recognize people’s right to information. International instruments on human rights affairs have recognized the Right to Information as a basic right. Article 19, UDHR, 1948, recognizes that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless to frontiers” (UDHR 1948. Universal Declaration on Human Rights).

Article 19, ICCPR, 1966, (International Covenant on Civil and Political rights) imposes “a positive obligation on States to ensure access to information particularly with regard to information held by Government in all types of storage and retrieval systems.” (Article 19 ICCPR 1966). Bangladesh signed the ICCPR, 1966 on September 6, 2000. Thus, it became an obligation for the government to introduce legal provisions for citizens claiming Information as their right. The RTI act has been in enforcement in an environment where the government

is often blamed for the culture of secrecy. People are not aware of what is happening around them. The public officials are thought to be inefficient, ill-disciplined, and unaccountable. Decision making in the public organization is not transparent as secrecy in both political and administrative sphere is jealously guarded by policies such as the Official Secrets Act, 1923 and the Government Service Conduct Rules, 1979, which deny citizens' access to relevant files and documents.

2.1 Implementing Organizations

There are around 30,000 information providing units on the government level, with roughly 30,000 NGOs operating in Bangladesh (Information Commission, 2014). So far, 16,387 designated officers have been appointed as Information Officer in government organizations, which constitute 55% of the total information providing units. On the other hand, 3,769 information officers have been appointed in NGOs. For sensitization of government officers, training programs are being implemented for entry-level officers. Anam (2009) says that "In enactment of the RTI Law Bangladesh has made a strong statement to the world that it is committed to establishing transparency and accountability in public institutions. This commitment will be tested only with proper implementation of the law."

According to the Information Commission Report, in 2023, a total of 8,747 applications were made. In the case of 7,950 of the applications (90.89%), information was provided, while no information was given to 8.81% and remaining of the applications were process. Although the number of applications is very low, disposal of applications is satisfactory. The majority of the people do not have a clear idea how to seek information. That is why in many cases they are more interested in receiving information verbally or informally. Since 2010, a total of 1,56,655 applications were made, which is very low compared to the huge population of the country.

2.2 Information Commission

As proposed in the Act, a three-member information commission was set up as the first step in July 2009, immediately after the enactment of the Act. The Information Commission is designated to coordinate implementation of RTI in Bangladesh. "Specialized units and oversight bodies have proven critical to ensuring full implementation and compliance with the law" (Florini, 2007). Structurally, this commission is independent and capable of discharging its duty. The status of the law is fine, although the status of the Information Commissioners is lower compared to other constitutional organizations in Bangladesh.

As is found in the case of Canada, "Nominating a lead implementer with sufficient seniority, respect and power will provide the foundational message to the other parts of the administration, public service, and civil society that the government is serious in its effort" (Neuman, 2007). Personnel from ministries/divisions, directorates, district level offices received training on RTI from the commission. A selected part of RTI has been introduced in textbooks for awareness building among future generations.

2.3 Right to Information Act, 2009

Right to Information Act, 2009 states that the right to information means the right to get information from any public organization. Information includes notes and photocopies, certified copies of documents or records, certified samples of materials, obtaining information from digital devices such as diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or any other electronic mode or through print-outs. (RTI Act, 2009).

The act has acknowledged the right to information as an undeniable part of freedom of thought, conscience, and speech as mentioned in its introduction; the preamble states that "if the right to information of the people is ensured, transparency and accountability in all public, autonomous and statutory organizations, and in other private institutions run on government or foreign funding shall increase, corruption of the same shall decrease and good governance of the same shall be established" (RTI Act, 2009). There are 37 sections in 8 chapters which provide a clear guideline on how to collect, preserve, maintain and provide information.

2.4 Scope of the RTI Act, 2009

According to the RTI Act, 2009, any citizen can seek information from any authority and the authority is bound to provide information to the applicant. The important feature of the RTI Act, 2009 is that the Act not only designates public organizations as an "authority." Any private organization, using public or foreign funds, is also considered an authority under this Act. It is mandatory for such authorities to disclose information voluntarily as well as on demand except, if the information is related to state security. Every authority is mandated to catalogue and index all information and preserve it in a proper manner within reasonable time-limits. Information disclosures in most of the cases are mandatory and pro-active except in a few areas which are concerned with national security and have been exempted from such provision (RTI Act, 2009). Moreover, each authority must publish information regarding decisions taken, as well as proceedings or activities accomplished or proposed, and must be indexed in a way that

is easily accessible to citizens (RTI Act, 2009) Authorities must also publish a yearly report containing organizational structure, activities, duties of officials, operational procedure, lists of necessary laws, acts, ordinances, rules, regulations, notifications, directives, manuals etc. and a list of facilities and particulars of assigned officers.

2.5 Procedure of RTI Implementations

Citizens can apply for information either in written or electronic form or through email and need to pay a realistic fee as prescribed by the officer-in-charge. In addition, every authority shall make and publicize a information and supply it free of cost. If citizens do not receive the applied information within the time frame, they can appeal to the Appealing Officer. In the case that the citizens are not served by the appealing officials, they can go to the information commission.

2.6 Exemptions

The following organizations are exempted from the RTI Act on the grounds of being involved with national security and intelligence.

1. National Security Intelligence (NSI)

2. Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI)

3. Defense Intelligence Units

4. Special Security Force (SSF)

5. Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Bangladesh Police

6. Intelligence Cell of the National Board of Revenue

7. Special Branch of Bangladesh Police

8. Intelligence Cell of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)

The Government can amend the schedule in consultation with the Information Commission and decrease or increase the number of institutions and notify citizens through government gazettes.

Chapter – 03
Methods & Theoretical Framework

This study combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive picture of RTI implementation in Power sector of Bangladesh from the implementers' perspective.

A purposive sample was employed. The sample includes designated Information Officers form different agencies of power divisions. There are 19 agencies under power division in Bangladesh, which are the key organizations for generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. Out of 19 officials, all officials have been interviewed (see interview questions in Appendix-I). The interviewees are solely responsible for implementation of RTI policies in their respective organization. They are middle/senior level officials.

The interviews were conducted over a period of 15 days (February) in 2025. The interviews were conducted in person and typically lasted around 15 minutes. Qualitative data analysis techniques were employed to organize as well as to analyze the collected data. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the transcripts were thematically analyzed to provide a unique perspective on the information officials. The results reflect unique pictures in the narratives of public officials in Bangladesh and their perceived barriers to implementation of RTI in Bangladesh.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Newman and Calland's (2007) framework systematically study the challenges to implementation of right to information laws is quite significant since it is based on comparative knowledge of RTI laws and practices across the continents. This framework consists of several components, which are very important in examining the implementation of RTI policies. According to Newman and Calland (2007), drafting of the laws is directly tied to implementation. This is also supported by public policy implementation literature in general. Drafting of the laws includes issues such as mandatory publication of certain information, time limits for completion of information requests, costs for requests, sanctions for failure to comply, reporting requirements and appeal procedures etc. It also includes principles of good record making and records management and the primacy of the law over other laws.

All these practicalities will determine the value and usability of the law. The politics of implementation is identified as the second key component which includes political will, choice of the individual or agency to implement the law, and the roles of the frontline employees. Effective implementation demands political commitment from the top. It can help change mind-shift of the bureaucracy and ensure resource allocations, which are necessary for RTI implementation. However, political will may vary from country to country. Government System Building is the third key component, which means internal systems and procedures to generate and provide information and training of civil servants to ensure understanding and compliance-to equip the supply side. It includes record keeping and archiving, record making, and automatic publication of records and internal systems. The internal system itself is a broad area, which covers guidelines for civil servants for implementing the job, identifying and providing training to information officers, planning for oversights and coordination, and enforcing incentives and punishments for civil servants. The fourth and final component is the demand side for government information. This component is mainly based on right to information statutory regimes. The purpose of this paper is to determine the RTI experiences in Bangladesh from the framework set forth by Newman and Calland as it is recognized as one of the first systematic frameworks of its kind, developed based on international comparative data.

Based on Laura Newman and Richard Calland's framework, this study will try to seek information on the following issues.

Selected Components	**Identifiable Factors**
Drafting of the laws	How the Procedures drafted
Politics of Implementations	Political will, choice of agency head, role of frontline employee
Attitude of the Officials	Whether Positive or Negative
Awareness	Whether citizens are aware?
Government System Building (Record Management, Training & Oversight)	Whether Record management is up-to-date? Whether DIOs Received training?
Resources	Whether DIOs have resources?

Table 1: Analytical Frameworks

3.2 Survey Design, Sampling, Data Collection, Measures, and Variables

The survey has five sections in total with 9 questions that probe the views of researchers on implementation of RTI in Bangladesh. The survey asks respondents to rate their perceived barriers to RTI implementation in Bangladesh on a 5 Likert scale (Table 1.0). In total, 19 responses were received from 19 respondents.

Statement	Scale					Number of Responses
	1	2	3	4	5	e
Perceived Performances						
RTI act has enhanced transparency in my organization	0%	10%	0%	30%	60%	19
RTI act has enhanced clients'' satisfaction significantly	0	0	15	45	40	19
Attitude of the Official						
I am pro-active to provide information	0	0	0	56	44	19
Government System Building						
We have adequate training on RTI Act	0	10	0	30	60	19
Record management is up-to-date to provide information in my organization.	33	13	0	34	20	19
We get support from the top for RTI implementation	0	10	20	40	30	19
Resources & Facilities						
We have sufficient logistics support to provide information	19	13	0	57	11	19
Public Awareness						
Citizens are not aware of right to information	18	14	20	33	15	19
Citizens have perceptions that Government does not want to disclose information	23	9	33	11	24	19

(Strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, not sure=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5)

Table 2: Questions & Responses in Likert Scale

Chapter 4
Analysis and findings

4.1 Characteristics of respondents

Table 1.1 shows the characteristics of the 19 respondents to the survey; 78.95% were male and 21.05% were female.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	4	21.05	21.05
Male	15	78.95	78.95
Total	19	100.00	100.00

Table 3: Gender of respondents

Table 1.2 shows that the age ranged from 32-58 and more than 72.72% of respondents are senior level officials, which means that government has given much importance to the implementation of right to information policies in Bangladesh by charging senior level officials with RTI implementation in various ministries and divisions.

Age Range	Percentage	Remarks
32-37	5.45	Entry Level Official
38-43	21.81	Mid-level Official
44-49	27.27	Senior Level Official
50-55	38.18	Senior Level Official
56-58	7.27	Senior Level Official
Total	100	

Table 4: Interviewees

4.2 Perceived Performances

The main objectives of the implementation of RTI policies are to enhance transparency. In regard to the transparency of the organizations, 90% of those who responded reported that RTI implementation has increased transparency and 85% reported that it has enhanced clients' satisfaction which indicates positive performance of public officials designated for RTI policy implementation.

4.3 Attitude of the Official

The culture of secrecy and lack of openness have been a colonial legacy in the bureaucracy of Bangladesh. In the survey, the attitude of the officials toward implementation of RTI laws in Bangladesh was found to be very positive. 100% of the respondents said that they are proactive in providing information. However, in the interview, different faces of officials are revealed as are reflected in the following statements;

> *"Anyone can apply for any information, this is nonsense, and gives a lot of bother to us" (Respondent 13)*
>
> *"I am fed up with applications. Applicants should justify why they need information. They complain to the Information Commission, I have received summonses to explain delays" (Respondent 9)*
>
> *"Only the concerned persons should apply for information and his motive to collect information should be mentioned in the application form" (Respondent 17)*

It is common that most governments work in a secretive fashion. Newman and Calland (2009) state that, "The notion of transparency is invariably far beyond the range of experience and mind-set of most public bureaucrats" and this is clearly evident in the statements mentioned above. It will take much time for a change of mind-set to transform the culture of secrecy into one of openness.

4.4 Government System Building

According to the regulations of the RTI Act, 2009, every organization is supposed to prepare guides and catalogues, compile information, and publish it in timely manner. In the survey, 54% of the respondents reported that record management in their organization is up-to-date. The websites of big and important ministries are found to be more updated than small ministries. However, in the interviews, a unique picture was found in the narrative of one official:

> *"Information we provide mostly are dead information which applicants don't need; what they need, we deliberately don't like to publish." (Respondent 8)*

Various studies have identified that one clear benchmark for the performance of the implementation is whether information officials have been appointed and whether they have received training. Bureaucrat's knowledge of laws, rules and process are essential for the implementation of the RTI Act. Training can facilitate this process. In the survey, 90% have

said that they have adequate training for implementation. However, they lack some associated knowledge like IT knowledge. In the interview, respondents suggested training for officials of subordinate officers since they need to collect information from them.

> *"Training should be provided to all officials and staffs since we need to collect information from them, but they are not aware of RTI." (Respondent 4)*

70% of the respondents reported that they get support from top management regarding RTI implementation in their organizations.

4.5 Responsibility of Oversight

Monitoring and coordination units are important as Newman and Calland (2009) mentioned: "Specialized coordination units are necessary beyond the implementation phase, particularly for education, training, and monitoring." However, the interesting fact is that in such units information officers have been given the assignment in addition to their other regular duties. This means that if there is a larger number of applications than usual, one or the other of their responsibilities will be hampered. On the other hand, at this stage, if an independent officer is given responsibility, he would not have much to do, since the applications are not abundant in number. Regarding coordination and reporting, there is a very clear system. However, in the interviews, respondents made suggestions for independent units in their ministry/division.

> *"There should be an independent cell/unit for Designated Information Officials." (Respondent 2)*

4.6 Government Capacity

Weak record management systems are major drawbacks in implementing RTI laws and policies in Bangladesh. There are many arguments regarding record management in relation to implementation of the right to information. A number of scholars argue that government should ignore past documents and establish an archiving system for future gathering of information. Creation of a "road map" of existing documents is equally important for holders of information and potential requesters. Whether the archival laws are consistent with modern record keeping should also be taken into consideration. According to Newman and Calland (2009), "The best approach for dealing with vast amounts of information is simply to make as many records as possible automatically and unconditionally available." When records are created, it is better to publish the information proactively as this reduces the number of information requests and delays in procedure. Government websites can be storehouses for providing such information. However, this may not work well in developing countries where the majority of the people

don’t have internet access. In the survey, more than 70% reported that record management is not up-to-date for implementation of RTI in Bangladesh. Moreover, there are no incentives for officials who are assigned to provide information as designated information officers or support staff.

> *“We should be given exemption in case of failure in providing old information, due to unavailability of records.” (Respondent 7)*

4.7 Resources

Resources are extremely important for the implementation of RTI. Although in the survey, more than 70% said that they have adequate resources, they revealed in the interviews that, in order to save money, they are given responsibilities as information officials in addition to their regular duties.

> *“We should get extra incentives since we are doing extra works.” (Respondent 5)*

4.8 Public Awareness

RTI laws require proactive release of information as well as response to an applicant’s request. However, if people are not very aware of their right to information, it will not be fruitful. As indicated by Hubbard (2008), a lack of public awareness is related to a low number of information requests, even in nations where freedom of information has been established long ago. In the survey, 90% of the respondents said that people are not aware of RTI in Bangladesh. Although people are interested in this act, they do not have a clear idea of how to seek information. However, it is anticipated that there will be huge demand in the future. In the interviews, respondents revealed a picture of brokers applying on behalf of applicants in regard to financial dealings.

> *“People are not aware of RTI, so there emerged broker or professional applicants and we are receiving a lot of applications by single applicant on different matters.” (Respondent 18).*

Chapter 05
Challenges and Recommendations

5.1 Challenges to RTI Implementations in Bangladesh

In the open-ended questions in the interviews, respondents identified the perceived challenges to the implementation of RTI in Bangladesh as shown in Table 1.3. Lack of financial resources and logistic support are the most important challenges mentioned. All ministries and divisions are located inside the Bangladesh secretariat, which is a highly restricted area. It is difficult for ordinary citizens to get access there and apply for information, even though there is scope to apply through email. Respondents mentioned that citizens' perceptions are that government organizations are not open to providing information. This is a difficult task to process and provide very old information; in addition, sometimes there are applications for very sensitive information.

Perceived Challenges	Frequency
Financial Constraints	13
Manpower and Logistics Problems	6
There is no independent unit for providing information; Officials do it as an additional task.	11
Ministry is a restricted area	9
Perception of the people about government is somewhat negative	4
This is very difficult to process and provide very old information	6
Citizens are not eager to apply	8
Sometimes there are applications for sensitive information	16

Table 5: Challenges Perceived by the Information Officials

5.2 Policy Recommendations by Information Officials for effective implementation of the law (N=19)

Respondents have provided policy recommendations based on the challenges they are facing in RTI implementation in their ministries/divisions. Since they are working in addition to their regular duties, they have suggested financial incentives and recognition for performance.

Statement	Frequency
There should be financial incentives to compensate shortage of manpower	15
Applications should be specific and objectives oriented	17
There should be independent unit	12
Mass awareness for RTI	9
Recognition for best performances	16

Table 6: Policy Recommendations by Information Officials

Chapter 06
Discussions and Conclusion

6.1 Discussions

Enactment of laws and policies is easier than implementation since implementation requires the government's capability of facing challenges. Despite having a number of laws, rules, and policies, we see poor governance and lack of rule of law in many developing countries due to the failure of effective implementation of laws and policies. Scholars argue that the impact of RTI is ideographic and many things such as the social, political, and, historical context of different countries need to be taken into account (Darch and Underwood 2010).

Considering the time period since the RTI Act has been in effect in Bangladesh, the implementation progress so far is moderately satisfactory as mentioned in Anam (2009), "Though the RTI Act, 2009 has not fully incorporated all international best practices, yet compared to many countries it is a progressive law," since, any policy needs a minimum time period to get its momentum for effective implementation. However, that momentum depends on the issues that need to be periodically identified and properly addressed. As Newman and Calland (2007), say "Even the best laws can be rendered meaningless when the myriad of implementation challenges are not addressed." In the study, many of the officials clearly stressed the need for resources, logistics, and training.

The findings from the descriptive statistics suggest that some matters should be addressed. While a number of respondents to the open ended questions specifically emphasized that implementation of RTI Act is a critical component in RTI working, they have identified the following areas as being very important for the RTI Act's implementation in Bangladesh: financial constraints; manpower and logistics; inaccessibility of ministries and divisions since these are in restricted areas; negative perception of the people about government; complicated office procedures; applications for old or sensitive information; brokers; and no independent units for providing information. In the open ended questions, officials proposed some recommendations in order to effectively implement RTI laws and policies in Bangladesh.

The first three priorities from the open-ended responses reconfirm the findings from the close-ended survey questions. Although the findings of the study are consistent with the model proposed by Neuman and Calland (2007) and the key issues surrounding RTI information in Bangladesh conform to the findings of some other countries, despite the contextual differences, there are some similarities in Bangladesh's experience to the experiences of other nations in

implementation of right to information policies. However, there is some uniqueness in the findings as well. Lessons for other countries are that the government did not introduce RTI policies in Bangladesh willingly; it was triggered and pioneered by non-political government forces, but is being forwarded with commitment by the political government.

However, the government has also enacted some new laws, which are against the spirit of RTI policies. This raises debate over whether the government is willing to implement RTI policies. The RTI Act, 2009 is, to some extent, incompatible with existing administrative practice and the culture of secrecy. Through content analysis of the websites of the ministries and divisions, it is clear that only large ministries provide proactive information. However, most of the information disclosed is positive, superficial, trivial, and static. The large ministries update their information regularly. There is no negative information that indicates failure of the organizations.

6.2 Conclusion

The study contributes to the understanding of RTI implementation in Bangladesh, and provides policy recommendations to address identified issues. The main contribution of the study is that it provides pictures from the implementers of RTI at the highest level of bureaucracy in Bangladesh, which is usually inaccessible for such research. Existing research has not paid attention to the implementers on the core level of civil service in Bangladesh. Future research can be made on the district level implementation of RTI in Bangladesh, as the district is an important administrative unit in Bangladesh. That can show the overall implementation of RTI in Bangladesh. The unique and unexpected features identified can be addressed for better implementation of RTI in Bangladesh.

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Appendix-I
Interview Questionnaires on Right to Information

Questions for Face to Face Interview (Information Officer)

1. How many applications do you receive in every month?
2. How many applications can you respond within time frame?
3. How do you make people informed about their application status?
4. Have you received any training on RTI?
   a. Yes b. No
5. Do you have sufficient logistics support to provide information?
   a. Yes b. No , If No,
6. What logistics do you need to provide information?
7. Do you face problems in providing information?
   a. Yes b. No.
8. If yes, what are those problems?
9. How are you handling those problems? What are your suggestions to improve implementation of RTI Act?
10. How often do you publish news/update website?

Appendix-II
Interview Questionnaires on Public Service Innovations

1. Does your organization have innovation program?
   a. Yes b. No If Yes,
2. What types of Innovations are being carried out?
3. What challenges are you facing in carrying out Innovations?
4. How do you tackle the Challenges?
5. What factors, do you think influence public service innovations in Bangladesh?